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12 September 1952

MEMORANDUM FOR: [REDACTED]

SUBJECT : Evaluation of the Southeast Asia Area Program.

1. A specialized area program on Southeast Asia was a commendable endeavor, but from the point of view of the [REDACTED] the project was a disappointment and perhaps a failure. After the first few sessions, attendance by the six participating members of this office rapidly fell off, the three principal reasons being: 1) The consistently hot weather; 2) The work load at the office, which often required the case officers either to miss the day's session or to arrive at class late; and 3) The poor performance of many of the instructors. (Some common remarks heard after a class were: "Gee, Wasn't that awful?" or "What a waste of time that hour was!").

2. By unfortunate circumstance, the program coincided in part with a near record long heat wave of almost two weeks of plus 90° weather. Personnel located in the offices by the reflecting pool were usually dismissed from work early in the afternoon during this heat wave; and naturally, there was very little incentive to stay around to attend the session which would be still scheduled. Furthermore, the classes were held in a non air-conditioned room which lacked windows and which buzzed with the noise of five fans. (The students seated at the rear of the classroom often complained that they could only understand the instructor with great difficulty). The scheduled period of 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. was also an unfortunate time choice from the point of view of the fact that it was usually the hottest period of the working day-- a time when the student was not particularly alert or fresh. It was not unusual to look around the class and observe several students simultaneously yawning or dozing at their desks.

3. In addition, the scheduled period of 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. was an unfortunate choice because that was often the busiest period of the day at the office; the projects for the day were often in high gear and conferences were in session or scheduled. A further obstacle to regular attendance was the fact that the session often conflicted with the vacation plans of the Desk personnel. Not only had certain of the personnel attending the course made vacation plans which overlapped the scheduled period; but, as in the case of this writer, there

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were those who missed part of the session because they had to remain at the office to replace their colleagues or superiors who were away on vacation.

4. Aside from enervating weather and the inappropriateness of the scheduled dates for the course, this writer was disappointed with such lectures as he did hear. Firstly, the subject matter was much too general; so much so that the impression was received that the instructors were often forgetting that their audience consisted of area specialists and not college underclassmen. Secondly, it sometimes seemed as though not enough original preparation had been made on the lectures themselves, considering the audience for which they were designed. For example, while [ ] was an entertaining and for the most part an able instructor, this writer was often struck by the similarity between his lectures and the chapters of his book, Southeast Asia, Crossroads of Religion.

5. It is recommended that in the future, more specialized area courses be offered covering each of the countries of Southeast Asia in turn, instead of a general course covering the whole region. For example, the session in 1953 might be devoted to Burma, that of 1954 to Thailand, that of 1955 to Indo-China, and so forth for six years. In the seventh year another intensive course might be in order again for Burma, treating the developments of that nation during the six interim years. Each year's session should consist of a concentrated area study covering such topics as: the strategical geographical characteristics of the area; the nation's economic problems and vulnerabilities; its history, its political parties and major personalities; its political trends; its minority groups, etc. It is felt by this writer that such a course, if offered, would be of invaluable assistance to the [ ]

6. Should such a program be initiated, it is suggested that it be conducted within the agency (so that semi-covert personnel from the operating Desks could attend), and that it be given on a two-hour-a-day basis similar to the arrangement this summer. It is further recommended that any future course be given either in the fall, winter, and spring seasons, or else that the sessions be held in an air-conditioned room.

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